DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 417 781 JC 980 179

TITLE Assessment of Institutional Impact and Long-Term Strategies Development.

INSTITUTION American Association of Community Colleges, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 1997-00-00
NOTE 8p.; Report of the Commission on Workforce and Community Development, Work Group III.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Change Strategies; *Community Colleges; Educational Change; Educational Needs; Faculty Development; Financial Support; Futures (of Society); Institutes (Training Programs); Institutional Evaluation; Instructional Innovation; *Job Training; *Labor Force Development; Labor Needs; Lifelong Learning; *Needs Assessment; Organizational Objectives; Partnerships in Education; Performance Based Assessment; *School Business Relationship; Strategic Planning; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

If community colleges are to expand their roles in delivering workforce training, they must develop long-term strategies that respond effectively to changes in society and workforce needs. In rendering these change strategies, colleges should define their internal and external environments, as well as their service areas. Internally, instructional methods should be investigated and "updated." Class information flow traditionally is controlled by the instructor, rather than by the timing needs of the individual student. This practice, bound by time and place, is less than effective in meeting workforce and educational needs and must be transformed into a more timely and cost-efficient method of delivery to capture the workforce training market. In the external environment, businesses face a growing need to keep their employees current with new technologies, and many are using outside providers for this training. Marketing limitations, delayed curricula development, and expensive classes prevent many community colleges from filling this educational niche in the business world. Traditional curriculum must be placed in the context of real-life situations, and the organizational structure and focus of community colleges must shift from teaching to learning in order for two-year colleges to respond effectively to the needs of their service communities. (EMH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 417 781

Assessment of Institutional Impact and Long-Term Strategies Development

American Association of Community Colleges

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY:

T. Gollattscheck

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X 980 179

Assessment of Institutional Impact and Long-Term Strategies Development

Commission on Workforce and Community Development
American Association of Community Colleges
Work Group III

Chairman
Dr. Eldon L. Miller

Support Staff
Dr. James McKenney

Members
Dr. Brenda Beckman
Dr. George Boggs
Dr. Zerrie D. Campbell
Dr. David E. Daniel
Dr. Keith Fenton
Dr. Richard Hinckley
Dr. Edward J. Liston
Dr. H. Jeffrey Rain
Dr. Bonnie L. Rogers
Dr. Martha A. Smith
Dr. Charles C. Spence

Assessment of Institutional Impact and Long-Term Strategies/Implications

Overview

Numerous community colleges across the country are developing and initiating mechanisms to provide training to business, industry, government, and labor. Many of these training initiatives are exemplary programs that respond well to workplace needs. Given various fiscal and organizational constraints, a large number of community colleges have been quite successful in providing workforce training. However, with the escalating development of technology, global competition, and the changing nature of the workforce, there is more to be done.

While prevailing community college functions and structures have served institutions well in the past, rapid changes and workforce needs are forcing modifications to some time-honored practices and

procedures. Obstacles to more effective delivery of workforce training by community colleges raise concerns regarding colleges and their operations, funding formulas, delivery systems, employment qualifications, compensation systems, and even the architecture of institutions. Reduced federal financial resources will affect both current and future levels of service.

If community colleges are to continue or consider expanding their roles in delivering workforce training, these issues must be addressed. Community colleges in the United States have a rich history of adaptation to change. Responding to societal needs and directions are the hallmark of these institutions. This paper identifies areas of concern and strategies for change and adjustment.

I. Defining the Environment in Community Colleges and Their Service Areas

Internal Environment. The community college philosophy is built on the principle of responding to community needs, and colleges tend to reflect their environment. Traditional college structures are prevalent in community college administrative, management, and organizational systems. Generation of FTE credit drives resource allocations and funding formulas.

Faculties are hired based on traditional credentials of degrees, experience, and certifications. As a result, colleges have predominately traditional faculty teaching traditional courses in traditional ways. Units of instruction are fixed time components (semesters and hours) and are bound by place (i.e., classroom and college campus). Student performance is frequently measured by grades based on faculty-established criteria. Letter grades usually do not reflect mastery levels or desired skills. Courses and programs can easily be institutionally driven in terms of desired outcomes as opposed to externally driven where the goal is the accomplishment of needs and skills.

Often the lecture method is still the prevailing instructional pedagogy. It is based on instructor-bound learning where the instructor disseminates information and knowledge to the student. The curriculum is discipline based and may not be integrated with the learning experience (and/or objectives) of other disciplines.

Research has shown that employers need to know:

- what students know
- how well they know it
- how current the knowledge is
- what job performance-related skills students have acquired
- at what level the skills can be performed
- with what degree of consistency the skills can be performed and the performance standards by which they are measured.

Colleges tend to focus on preparing the top 20 percent of the workforce, even though the remaining 80 percent and their preparation appear to be the critical issue. These needs are in the areas of soft skills: reading, writing, problem solving, information processing and teamwork. Traditional methods target the mid-range of student ability. The information flow is controlled by the instructor, rather than by timing needs of the individual student. This slows down the fast learner, unnecessarily increasing time costs, and moves too fast for the slower learner, decreasing the impact of the learning experience. This place- and time-bound structure is becoming less effective in meeting workforce and educational needs.

To respond to workplace changes, employers seek training of their workforce that is effective, timely, and cost efficient. College calendars and faculty contracts often hamper the delivery of short-term, concentrated training sessions, on-site training, and so on. Training for many employees needs to be available on a 24-hour basis, seven days per week. Traditional college timetables and related attitudes affect the institution's ability to respond. As a consequence, community colleges are sometimes sporadic providers of timely training. Furthermore, current schedules often prevent faculty from receiving curriculum development training.

In some cases the knowledge and skills of these training instructors are somewhat out of date, and they sometimes have little more advanced technological experience than the employees who are their students. Faculty tend to be caught in the middle of a technological dilemma: changes in technical applications by business and industry sometimes move faster than the rate at which colleges can upgrade their faculty and equipment. The need to keep abreast of technological sophistication becomes more costly each year. Changes in technology require new educational delivery systems, which will call for major changes in the operational structure of many colleges.

A number of national studies indicate that almost all community colleges conduct some training activities for business, industry, labor, and government. However, a great percentage of this training is customized to meet specific needs and is a one-time effort. Few colleges use current and repetitive credit courses to satisfy this training.

Since they do not fit as neatly into traditional operational and funding categories, continuing education, services to business and industry, and training programs tend to be considered a peripheral part of the college educational mission and are given lower priorities. As a result, colleges tend to operate as if learning and work are separate functions with different goals. Workforce development activities are viewed as training while traditional programs and instruction are defined as education. Limited numbers of faculty from the traditional college ranks teach training courses. Because of this, communication among traditional education divisions and vocational/technical programs is often limited.

Much of the community college training focuses on management and sales. Colleges often lack adequate resources to develop and support other training programs. Such programs often do not receive local or state funding, nor do small- to medium-sized businesses have finances to support this function. As a result, some colleges have been unable to upgrade equipment and training in a timely manner to appropriately prepare workers, which would allow industry to adopt new technology confidently.

Compounding the dilemma is the reduced funding for higher education occurring in many states, often due to competition for funds from other state services. Community colleges are being expected to do more with less and to prioritize more carefully. Sometimes training is not considered a high priority. In some states funding programs hinder the delivery of workforce training by failing to support noncredit college courses, nontraditional programs, and schedules and locations conducive to workforce training.

However more public-private partnerships are being developed among colleges and business, industry, labor, and government. These can and will leverage considerable sums of money to finance such projects. Again, these are confined usually to the "shadow college" and are outside the mainstream of traditional operations.

External Environment. State governments are now more concerned about the expenditure of state funds by higher education. Some states are moving toward performance-based funding as a means of establishing more accountability.

State and national legislative trends focus more on workforce training and preparation for students. This includes major retraining of current employees as companies strive to retain a competitive edge.

Estimates are that a high percentage of the current workforce will require retraining in the next decade. Most of the jobs created during this time will require two years of postsecondary education. Community colleges are finding it difficult to respond adequately to the needs of the workplace with limited allocations for training programs. Most college divisions that provide training and services to business and industry must operate on a self-sufficient basis, generate revenue, and maintain sufficient cash flow to operate.

Rather than training their own workforce, companies are now using other providers for training. Businesses are becoming learning organizations, and the rate at which they can upgrade skills and technologies is critical to maintaining a competitive edge. This, in turn, places more demand on community colleges as an expeditious provider of training. The trend in the private sector to become more customer focused is also affecting the environment. Some community colleges are adopting this orientation.

There are a great many businesses that are unaware of the types of training available at community colleges. Marketing of college training programs tends to be somewhat limited. Some businesses and industries perceive training to be a cost rather than an investment. Yet colleges do little reporting of the actual return on the investment, which could inform and assist businesses. This would also position community colleges as a key player in the delivery of workforce training.

The inability of some colleges to respond as rapidly and flexibly as necessary to meet training needs causes many businesses to consider other providers — often in the private sector. Business and industry become frustrated by the expense and time it takes for faculty to develop a new curriculum, especially when prepackaged training modules with a proven success record are already available. These curricula have the additional advantage of ensuring consistency for a company that must train employees in a variety of different college districts.

II. Impact of External Environment on Internal Environment

External pressures may cause a number of changes. There will be pressure to move more from traditional grading and credit systems to competency/skills-based testing. Traditional curriculum must be placed in the context of real-life situations. The organizational structure and focus of community colleges must shift from teaching to learning. There will be some evaluation of instructor credentials in community colleges. The emphasis should be on the achievement of abilities and skills rather than degrees or other traditional credentials.

The traditional method of staff and faculty development may change. There will be less emphasis on voluntary participation in conferences and workshops and more on a systematic design using mastery level components. Faculty will have more contact with business and industry.

The training function in community colleges will receive more attention and evaluation. There will be pressure to give more notice and support to the community service/training/business services division of many community colleges. There may be more requests to offer smaller instructional/learning units — modules that can meet customized or individual needs for workforce training. Matrices of modules/learning units could be designed to accommodate specific desired outcomes.

Methods of payment as well as instructor contracts may have to be revised for those who teach training programs. The new contracts should reflect compensation for programs wanted by the private sector.

III. Strategies for Change and Adjustment

While there are recognized obstacles to a more effective delivery of workforce training, there are strategies that community colleges can adopt on their campuses. Initiatives to prepare the nation's workers with skills and knowledge so that American businesses can compete in the global marketplace must be a priority.

There must be increased effort to get more colleges to incorporate workforce training and economic development assistance as an important component of their mission. Educational activities must be designed and conducted to reinforce the understanding that workforce training and traditional education are really much the same in terms of goals. The general education core of the traditional community college curriculum has the potential to provide many of the work skills needed in business and industry.

Strategies must be initiated to make it clear that lifelong learning is a reality in the private sector as well as in higher education. A better understanding of change must be developed. Colleges should be helped to plan for organizational and operational modifications related to workforce development.

There must be some reorganizations of college systems to provide the delivery systems, programs, and appropriate staff to meet workforce training needs. Performance-based funding may be considered as a means to modify college missions and obtain appropriate support. Solutions must be sought to eliminate local and state regulations that are barriers to desired change.

Community college executives must work with local, state, and federal government officials and private sector representatives to develop policies and funding to permit more appropriate training programs and activities. Faculty must have more opportunity to interact with business, industry, labor, and other agencies to become more familiar with current operational techniques and technology needs.

A national program should be established to train a change agent for each college. These change agents should play a major role in restructuring appropriate operations within a college in relation to workforce training. The college president is the most important change agent. There should be efforts to garner state and national support for presidents as they integrate workforce training into the educational fabric of institutions.

National initiatives that should be undertaken include:

- Models of colleges that have successfully integrated training and economic development goals into their mission should be showcased nationally.
- There should be conferences and workshops to change the mindset that community colleges are responsible only for education, not training.
- A series of abstracts that focus on community colleges' role in workforce training development should be published (much like the Leadership abstracts).
- National telecommunications forums should be conducted on internal or external training and workforce development issues as associated with community colleges.
- A national "Workforce Development Day" should be organized, established, and promoted by the AACC. The intent would be that this is an awareness-building activity and employers' support would be solicited for that purpose.
- The AACC should be urged to work with other national organizations that have a vested interest in workforce training. These organizations could work with the "awareness day" and assist with mission modifications.
- Subcommittees of the Workforce Commission should present sessions at the AACC convention. Work teams from colleges should be solicited to attend these sessions.
- An open hearing at the AACC convention on "Workforce Development Roles" in community colleges should be conducted.

Summary

A number of these strategies and initiatives will require changes in the culture and perceptions that exist in some community colleges. Preparing both traditional and nontraditional students for the world of work is a goal for all of the curricular components of community colleges. Meeting the needs of society through student outcomes will require a team effort of community college, state, and national leaders.